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"I See Tangible Progress". What Gen. David "Surge" Petraeus was saying in 2004

By Alexander Cockburn

On September 26, 2004, the general now picked by President Bush to "secure" Baghdad published an upbeat piece about military progress in Iraq in the *Washington Post*. In effect it was a piece of unalloyed self-promotion, designed to show that this ambitious lieutenant general knew how to turn things around.

Already in January 2004, when he was commanding the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul, Petraeus was cultivating admiring coverage in the press for his skill in bringing in former Iraqi army officers out of the cold and recruiting them to the Coalition's cause. What Petraeus was doing in Mosul, so the press reports proclaimed, could be the model for success throughout Iraq.

Later that year, on November 11, these fantasies collapsed with humiliating speed. Even as the U.S. forces destroyed Fallujah, Mosul – a city of 1.7 million people – fell into the hands of the insurgency, as thousands of police simply changed sides.

Gen. Petraeus was not in Mosul that November day to witness the utter refutation of his optimistic assessments of January 2004. He and the 101st Airborne had moved on. By then Gen. Petraeus was in command of the Multinational Security Transition Command in Iraq, from which vantage point he transmitted his next upbeat assessment to the *Washington Post*, to be read by the White House and by Congress.

"Now, however," Petraeus wrote, (**Cockburn** *continued on page 6*)

Populism, Lite and Dark: From John Edwards to James Webb

By JoAnn Wypijewski

John Edwards was at Riverside Church in mid-January. It was a King day prelude, organized by the church and MLK III on the subject of poverty in America, so they asked the man who has made poverty his signature issue. Ever since Edwards scribbled his "two Americas" speech on an envelope on the way to Iowa in '04, people have looked toward him as the standard bearer of a longed-for-populism. Even the right-wing *Times*' columnist David Brooks was lyrical about Edwards then, about his having tapped some deep wellspring in the country, distinguishing for one brief moment the Democrats as a party of values and ideas that resonated.

A few years on, Edwards is making the same pitch, and maybe it's just the familiarity or the greater grimness of the time or the fact that there, in Riverside Church, remembering King who in that same sanctuary forty years ago made his case against "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government", Edwards couldn't but be a comparison loser. Whatever the cause, Edwards was light, sunny-seeming even when talking about terrible things. "It's not okay," he said about the realities of poverty and war, as if talking to a grade school. It's not okay to talk in class. And then he appealed to service and responsibility, to "our better angels". It was all smooth and earnest and Kennedyesque, Obama in whiteface, with a dollop of Southern sentimentality. It wasn't populist. Edwards is not angry enough to be a populist.

For labeling sake Edwards will, no doubt, be called one as the campaign ratchets up, and maybe he'll even find the anger, but I can imagine a moment down the line, as disaster worsens and the gloom from Iraq spreads, as the country staggers through the ritual emptiness of an election season and people switch on with even greater gusto to Lou Dobbs as the only exponent of their fury and their pain, some smarty-pants Democratic insider, the kind that gets campaign consultancies and loves handicapping and banters knowingly with Chris Matthews, will get on the tube and muse that what the Democrats need is a real populist, someone unburdened by a record of voting for the war and unaccustomed to the snake oil of Washington; someone who's tough as a soldier, smart as a statesman and mad as hell; someone like James Webb.

Webb came to politics last year as a kind of Cincinnatus, challenging the Republican incumbent, who was George Allen, the junior senator from Virginia, a student of Reagan without the actor's abilities and without the scriptwriters. He'd come to Virginia from California, conflating the South with the West and Virginia with wrangler country, chewing tobacco, wearing cowboy hat and boots, saying y'all, joking about nooses and collecting mementoes of the Confederacy. It was a bad act, but enough white people bought it, electing him first as governor, then as senator, and talking seriously about him as presidential timber, the Republican nominee in 2008. The Democrats had no formidable opposition to Allen last year until someone began a campaign to draft Webb.

To that point the party's idea of a challenge was a New Democrat of the Clinton mold, neoliberal and representative of the high-tech sector that the party has rightly seen as a source of its

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own self-enrichment and wrongly identified with the voters' interests, casting all of Virginia, in this case, in the image of white professionals and technocrats in the D.C. suburbs, assuming the blacks would have to go along and simply factoring the immigrants and poor whites out of the equation.

Webb represented something else altogether: the Reagan Democrat, born into a line of Democratic voters going back generations but himself a Republican; Southern by family history but stateless by actual experience, a military brat and then a career soldier; a redneck by self-description, a Vietnam vet full of loathing for "the Vietnam generation," for hippies and the summer of love and, mostly, the liberal élite personified by Bill Clinton, who evaded the war but protected their own position in the system and then smugly wore their privilege in the halls of Georgetown Law School, where Webb, like Clinton, got a law degree.

To put it mildly, Webb has a chip on his shoulder. It is a class chip long ignored by the Democrats and brilliantly exploited by Reagan, in whose administration Webb served as secretary of the navy. Webb saw in "Dutch" an image of himself and the Scots-Irish about whom Webb presents himself as an authority. He offers the Scots-Irish as a people he essentializes as born poor but scrappy, blessed with the common touch and the storyteller's skill,

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traditionally Democratic but fiercely independent, sour on unions but enamored of soldiering, "born fighting", in the term Webb uses to sum up himself, his Scots-Irish "stock," the working class of America and Ronald Reagan, even if the closest the latter got to combat in World War II was at Fort Wacky, the wartime movie set in Los Angeles.

If it hadn't been for George W. Bush, Webb might have remained a Republican. More accurately, if it hadn't been for Bush going to war, Webb might never have left the fold. But Webb opposed the war in Iraq before it started, and in Bush he no doubt recognized that same galling combination of entitlement and self-righteous certitude that so enraged him as a law student. Running for the Senate thus allowed Webb in one stroke to fight the president on the war and the Clinton Democrats on the nature of the party. He beat the neoliberal high-tech man in the primary, and then he launched his general election campaign with a TV commercial linking himself to Reagan. To win their support, he told the state's unions that he'd never paid much attention to Reagan's domestic policies, and besides that was another time. Then he campaigned against corporate greed and outsourcing, against a "disparity between the rich and the poor, the likes of which we have not seen since the 19th century." Regardless of audience, he asked the veterans to stand and thanked them for their service; then he decried the shame of New Orleans, the shame of the health care system, the shame of corporate overreach and tax evasion. He called for raising new "revenue" from corporations and the rich as a matter of simple accounting and patriotism, not "class war". He let everyone know he opposed the war in Iraq but not as some sissy pacifist or slippery politician, rather as a soldier who regarded it a diversion from the necessary war on terror, a drain on his truest home, the U.S. military, and a catastrophe for American power in a world with more formidable enemies, like China and the countries whose desperate straits compel their people to flock here as "illegals," a word he used too liberally.

"I Am a Man" might have been his campaign slogan, with an echo of the Memphis sanitation workers' self-assertion in 1968, only here appropriated on behalf of anyone who has ever been denigrated as "white trash", a paean to the redneck's rising and the return of the man's man. Webb wouldn't get caught in debates over gay rights, opposing the ultimately successful marriage amendment, but largely keeping to himself his support for civil unions. Instead, he aimed to project a robust heterosexuality and in that way wordlessly to convey his long-held protest against the culture wars, promulgated by Marxists or pseudo-Marxists, so he writes in his book *Born Fighting*, to emasculate America and degrade its warriors, the white working class, who over hundreds of years have contributed the country's "most definitive culture".

On the last push of the campaign Webb rode in a heavily chromed, camouflage-painted Jeep, blazoned with decals and his campaign slogan, "Born Fighting". He told voters he was licensed to carry a concealed weapon and bristled that the National Rifle Association endorsed his opponent. Acquainted with killing and privation; at home with guns since he was 8 years old, just as all the male Webbs before and after him; potent like those elder Webbs too, at 60 married to a much younger woman who was rescued as a girl on a boat from Vietnam and was now heavy with his child. Dressed in army drab, Webb pumped his fists and appeared for all the world as someone trying so hard he doesn't even know he's trying anymore.

Unlike the big guns the party sent out with him in the campaign's last days – former Governor John Warner and Governor Tim Kaine, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton – he did not present himself as a boon to the larger fortunes of the party, a player on the team striving together to "take back America". He neither smiled readily nor pressed the flesh with ease. At a rally in Richmond he took the podium peevishly after Obama spoke for what seemed like thirty minutes, gliding back and forth upon the stage like a crooner or talk-show host, telling an adoring crowd of his hopes and dreams for America, plugging his book and forgetting, it appeared, that he was in Virginia for the midterms, for Webb, finally introducing the candidate as "the next great senator from the state of Illinois – oh, no, that's me!" Webb, florid and unsmiling, told the crowd, "For a while there I thought we were in New Hampshire." In later days he tried to make a joke of it, but the strain showed. By the final stretch Webb's driver, a one-armed vet whom Webb counts among his clos-

(**Wypijewski** *continued on page 4)*

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Meet Malcolm Gladwell, at the Bottom of the New Yorker's Barrel

By Fred Gardner

Malcolm Gladwell may be getting his comeuppance at last. Gladwell is an influential *New Yorker* writer, the author of two bestsellers, *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*. In January 2007, the *New Yorker* published a Gladwell piece called "Open Secrets" that the author described as "a semi-defense of Enron". It was promptly exposed as inaccurate and slanted by Joe Nocera of the *New York Times*.

Nocera pointed out the significance of Gladwell's deceit: "Already 'Open Secrets' has been embraced by those who argue that the Enron prosecutions were an effort to 'criminalize' what amounted to flawed business decisions. The efforts to weaken Sarbanes-Oxley [a reporting and accounting law detested by the corporate sector] are also rooted in the idea that the country overreacted to Enron and the other corporate scandals. In effect, the central defense argument – that Enron didn't really do anything illegal – has been given new life by Mr. Gladwell. And it isn't remotely true."

Gladwell's point, as summarized by Nocera, "is that more disclosure... would not have made any difference. But what Mr. Skilling (and others, including Enron's founder, the late Kenneth L. Lay) were charged with was not hiding things in plain sight but hiding things out of sight that would have exposed the fraud. That is, they lied to the investing public about the true conditions of the company."

It should come as no surprise that Malcolm Gladwell is a corporate shill. In 1997 the *New Yorker* published his paean to hormone replacement therapy (HRT), "The Estrogen Question: How Wrong is Dr. Susan Love?" in which Gladwell derided Love's warning that HRT could cause breast cancer. (Love, a distinguished clinician and UCLA professor, had been publicizing "The Nurses' Health Study" finding that women taking Premarin faced a higher rate of breast cancer.) Gladwell's piece culminated in a plug for Eli Lilly's new drug Raloxifene, which was about to be marketed as Evista. "Before very long," wrote Gladwell, "women worried about raising their breast-cancer risk will have the option of taking a different kind of hormone that doesn't affect their breasts at all – or that may even protect against breast cancer."

Raloxifene, Gladwell explained, represented "the next generation of HRT, the compounds known as SERMs (for 'selective estrogen receptor modulators')." To those of us tracking the marketing of Prozac it was obvious that Lilly, having made billions off its "selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor" anti-depressant, was reapplying the patter to its HRT drug. Gladwell scolded Love for not applauding the advent of SERMs. "You might think that it would be of enormous significance to Love, answering, as it does, her great worry about the potential side effects of HRT…" Gladwell's tone was coolly condescending throughout. "What Love has done is recalculate the risk-benefit equation for estrogen", he asserted, "which is fine, except that she consistently overstates the risks and understates the benefits."

Gladwell's defense of HRT is a textbook example of corporate damage control. Step No. 1, when a study reveals the harmful effects of your product, is to cite other studies drawing different conclusions. "I just reviewed the hormone/breast-cancer research from the last five years", Gladwell quotes an epidemiologist named Trudy Bush, "I found four reports – two very large and well done – showing no effect, and I found another study showing that estrogen gave women significant protection against breast cancer. They're all over the place." Claiming that existing studies are inconclusive and that more research is needed sounds reasonable and usually gives the drug company 10 extra marketing years. In the case of Premarin, Wyeth only got five because the leaders of the Women's Health Initiative had seen enough by 2002.

Step No. 2 is to attack the methodology of the revealing study. Gladwell faults the Nurses' Health Study for "selection-bias problems… The estrogen users, for example, had fewer pregnancies, got their periods earlier, and have other differences with the control group which would lead you believe that they might have had a higher risk of breast cancer anyway. There is another possible complication: estrogen does such a good job of fighting heart disease that most women who are on HRT live substantially longer than women who aren't." That's Step No. 3, the Bold Inversion. Gladwell's BI sounds like it came from the same marketing genius who reasoned that Prozac leads to suicide because it enables severely depressed people to overcome their lethargy.

Step No. 4 is simply smearing the messenger. If a researcher's professional credentials are unassailable, there's always guilt by association. Just as Lilly (falsely) linked their foremost critic, Peter Breggin, M.D., to the Scientologists, Gladwell puts Love in a vaguely disreputable "media-celebrity" category. "Her objection," he writes, "is to the idea that postmenopausal women should rely on any sort of drug at all. This is where, sooner or later, you end up when you start down the path of people like Andrew Weil and Deepak Chopra and Susan Love."

When Gladwell's hit piece on Love ran in June '97, I protested to a *New Yorker* friend that it was Lilly propaganda. Gladwell, I gleaned, was about 30 years old and with inconspicuous scientific credentials. He had worked briefly at the *Washington Post* and a magazine controlled by the Moonies. "Why is he allowed to pontificate about hormone replacement therapy to readers of the *New Yorker*?" I inquired. "He's an ex-roommate of Jacob Weisberg," I was told, as if that gave him standing. (Weisberg is an editor of the *New Republic*, one of many journalists who owe their careers to publisher Martin Peretz.)

In a 2001 article by Gladwell extolling the anti-malarial effects of DDT, the woman who had gotten her science wrong was Rachel Carson. DDT, according to the man Gladwell touted as the great authority, "ought to be used as selectively as possible, to quell major outbreaks," i.e., the present ban should be rescinded.

The massive, worldwide application of DDT had been promoted in the 1940s and '50s by a Rockefeller Foundation functionary named Fred Soper who, according to Gladwell, "ranks as one of the unsung heroes of the twentieth century". As it became clear that worldwide eradication was impractical – DDT-resistant mosquito strains developed – Soper discounted all evidence of failure. Gladwell describes Soper losing his temper at one meeting in response to "talk that was

(**Gardner** continued *col 3 page 6*)

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(**Wypijewski** *continued from page 2*)
est friends, a man with a face like granite and the slightly menacing carriage of an armed guard, might have been expressing the candidate's own frustrations, bitter about the forced niceties, practically spitting disdain for the string of elementary school halls his friend had had to visit and the time spent defending himself against the Allen camp's mudslinging. "I don't know why he puts himself through it," the driver said.

Webb is the angry man. And anger is as good an explanation as any to why he put himself through it. No sooner had he been declared the winner in Virginia, giving the Democrats their edge in the Senate, than he wrote a piece for the *Wall Street Journal*, which the paper headed "Class Struggle". There he resumed the themes of his campaign, only now in the breakfast companion of the capitalist class. He excoriated that class's "troubling arrogance", their "sense of entitlement bordering on hubris". He charged them with abandoning the public schools, shirking the country's wars, hoarding its stocks, protecting themselves through a vast system of tax loopholes, enriching themselves to obscene heights; in short, "living in another country", and betraying this one by "eviscerat[ing]" workers' ability to negotiate their future by imposing "the twin threats of modern corporate America: if they complain too loudly, their jobs might either be outsourced overseas or given to illegal immigrants".He didn't speak, as Clinton had, of feeling workers' pain or rewarding them for "playing by the rules". He was saying, "The rules are fixed", and warning the overdogs that unless they heed the cry of the underdogs, a category now swelling to include displaced white-collar workers, America would face "a period of political unrest".

Shortly after that, at a White House reception, President Bush asked him, "How's your boy?" referring to Jimmy Webb, a Marine currently stationed in Iraq. Webb responded by saying he believed Bush needed to bring the troops home. "That's not what I asked you", Bush snapped. "How's your boy?" To which Webb replied curtly, "That's between me and my boy". By January 10, when Bush made his announcement that he was escalating the war, Webb was one of the Democrats' chosen point men for rebuttal, appearing on public television to challenge the president's grasp on the war's realities and saying flatly that there could be no military victory in Iraq. As on the campaign, he argued for a regional and international diplomatic solution. With Republican Chuck Hagel, another Vietnam veteran whom Webb has been invoking as a comrade since the campaign, he has emerged as one of the president's most stringent critics. In the meantime, he has co-sponsored a Senate bill to raise the minimum wage, another to expand veterans' benefits on the order of the postwar GI bill, and another to commemorate the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

All of this no doubt confirms liberals such as those berthed at the *Nation* in their expressed view that Webb signifies the bright promise of a renewed populism and is the reason I can imagine the day when someone sighs, "What we need is a guy like Jim Webb for president..." Given the current cast of characters, that sigh might not even be the most bizarre wish.

Webb has a chip on his shoulder. It is a class chip long ignored by the Democrats and brilliantly exploited by Reagan.

But in their need or delusion, people seem to forget that populism in America isn't bright; it's dark, and so is Webb. The last candidate to try to change the old formula of a populist campaign, redefining "the people" as a collective, actually resembling the country and voicing their anger but not their spite, was Jesse Jackson. Although high on hope, Jackson wasn't sunny either, only almost no one called him a populist. He was simply "the black candidate", and almost by definition black candidates can't be populist because, like it or not, somewhere along the way populism has always been entwined with white supremacy.

In his book *Born Fighting*, written before he was a candidate, Webb makes the populist case for rescuing the poor and working class Southern white, specifically the Scots-Irish who he argues singlehandedly represent "the core character of the nation's working class", from the slur of "cracker", "racist" and "trash". He is right, of course, that liberal journalists think nothing of labeling white people on the hard side of life "trailer trash"; right that racism is an American, not merely Southern problem; right that the North since before the Civil War has been monstrously hypocritical, that white liberals and leftists can claim no immunity from racism, and that the white elite has long appreciated both racial division and superficial "diversity" as means of blurring class challenges and their own formidable class prejudice.

But Webb presses on. Having essentialized the Scots-Irish as uniquely gifted, he must also characterize them as uniquely vilified, victims first of the Union Army, then of Reconstruction, then of the railroads and corporate interests that kept them poor, and so on. The poor might have followed their slave-owning "Captains" to war (though their "natural" fighting spirit would have made them want to join as a matter of principle too). And then they may have gone along with Redemption, as the reinstitution of armed white rule, post-Reconstruction, was called. They may have gone along with lynching, Jim Crow, the Klan. Tom Watson, the once-great Georgia populist, may have moved from racial inclusion to racist demagoguery. In every case, there was honor or a job at stake, social ostracism or the destruction of a political career looming, or absolute hell in the offing.

Webb isn't wrong particularly; breaking from the pack has always had its price. Except that he spends so much time in the book arguing about his people's "natural" nonconformism, their refusal to join, to "bend the knee", that one wonders how there could have been all that going along, that crooking of the knee to the Captains, in the first place. Later, he lashes out at "the activist Left", which he imbues with immense powers, being fully in command of the nation's universities and other central institutions, for knocking the Captains off their pedestals – Andrew Jackson, Stonewall Jackson, the entire Confederate army – and doing "everything in its power to sue [the 'Southern rednecks'], legislate against their interests, mock them in the media, isolate them as idiosyncratic, and publicly humiliate their traditions in order to make them, at best, irrelevant to America's future growth." All this while simultaneously applauding Country as the dominant sound on the nation's radio

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stations, NASCAR as the dominant sport, and Scots-Irish blood as coursing through the veins of most recent presidents.

From the book's outset, it seems Webb is engaged more in an autobiographical howl than a work of social history, and near the end, when he speaks of his own humiliations at Georgetown, the case is plain. Unattractive as much of the book is, it's bracing to see an American politician so nakedly on the page, the sum of his manias and perceived slights and actual slights; and sobering thus to take the measure of the injuries of class. "The slurs stick to me", he writes. Likewise his father's life in rented houses, moving from base to base, struggling 26 years to get a college degree. Likewise his grandfather's pain and poverty, mining coal, following the crops as a migrant, living and dying on a sharecrop in Kensett, Arkansas, after being blackballed by the small-town baron, A.P. Mills, father of Wilbur, for telling local blacks they were being charged higher interest than whites at A.P.'s store.

Webb's arrival in the Senate, his recognition as an "important" Democratic voice, is therefore at once a rejoinder to all who ever tormented him and a validation from the very set he both despised and longed to be a part of.

On one of the last stops on the campaign, Webb visited the mining town of Clintwood in Dickenson County. A crowd of about 200 filled the low stools at the elementary school cafeteria, the men in worn jackets and baseball caps with foamy fronts and webbed plastic sides. There were coal widows with diamonds but more women with bad teeth and dull hair. Seventeen years ago, Dickenson and Russell counties were ground zero of the Pittston strike, the most remarkable labor struggle of modern times, which people in these parts still speak of as a recent memory. It was a union crowd that night, but Webb didn't mention the strike or the United Mine Workers, except to refer to its president, Cecil Roberts, who had traveled with him all day. At the time of the strike, in 1989, Pittston alone had some 26 facilities, including mines and processing centers, and the coal counties had 17,000 union workers. Only three mines in Virginia's six coal counties are still union now, with only 300 to 400 workers combined, and even with the nonunion mines the number is but a fraction of what it was.

At a dinner the night before, George Allen boasted that he'd helped the coal region "diversify" by bringing two prisons there. These prisons house "the worst of the worst", a young man who works at one of them told me in Clintwood. He hadn't wanted to follow his father into the mines, he said. He worked for a small engineering company, but when he was laid off at 19 with one child and no other prospects, he went to work in the prison. That was nine years ago, and he doesn't like it. But he has two children now, and he and his wife can't bring themselves to move away from their family, the only other option.

"I come from this culture", Webb told the people of Clintwood, but he really doesn't. These were joiners, people who understood that some times, many times, the toughest individual needs the class. Webb didn't even honor their history in his book; so insistent was he on asserting the Scots-Irish distrust of unions that he robbed them of their own achievement in founding arguably the most important unions in the building of U.S. industrial labor organization, the UMW and the Western Federation of Miners. (And robbed them also of their past of resistance and defeat under the most ruthlessly anti-union regimes in the industrial world.) He mentioned the book that night, and told the people that Tom Wolfe (quickly amending this to "the writer Tom Wolfe" for the sake of the blank faces in front of him) called it the greatest work of ethnographic history in recent times. He said, meaningfully, that the book's first words are "Gate City", the nearby town from which his ancestors hail, as if this would have any more significance for the crowd than that its high school is Clintwood's bitterest sports rival. He must not have known that.

Webb's deep culture and its fears were on better display, actually, the night before, at a dinner for Republican Party faithful in the town of Bristol on the Tennessee border. The dinner cost $10 -- for ham and corn, macaroni and cheese, and fresh-baked rolls -- and the people gathered awaiting George Allen's arrival were well dressed but not chic, Republicans of the "good cloth coat" variety, middle class with memories of worse, people near the top of the social ladder in a place where that doesn't reach too high. A little clutch of them were talking anxiously about their man's prospects, worried that between the votes of the "niggers" and the people who "favor the corporations", Webb might pull it out. They didn't care much, and some didn't believe, that Webb's people came from these parts, that he was career military, a former Republican, not generally flattering to corporations.

A woman named Jean McReynolds told me, earnest almost to tears, that what I had to know was that they never felt important until George Allen, rich, educated son of the famed Washington Redskins' coach, came to live among them as a young law clerk, and later came to ask for their vote. "Southwest Virginia, now we are considered to be a distressed area," she said, "but George Allen has never treated us that way – like we're different. He's always treated us just like we're part of America."

Maybe James Webb never felt important until first the military, then the Republican Party and finally Ronald Reagan made him feel that he was just part of America. And maybe now he's trying to find his way to something that feels authentically like home. But anger more than ideology is his compass; American populism's classic instrument, for wickedness and for good. CP

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(**Cockburn** continued *from page 1*)

"18 months after entering Iraq, I see tangible progress. Iraqi security elements are being rebuilt from the ground up. The institutions that oversee them are being reestablished from the top down. And Iraqi leaders are stepping forward, leading their country and their security forces courageously in the face of an enemy that has shown a willingness to do anything to disrupt the establishment of the new Iraq."

The devastating failure in Mosul received no mention. "There has been progress", Petraeus proclaimed, "in the effort to enable Iraqis to shoulder more of the load for their own security, something they are keen to do". Of course in the case of Mosul, as elsewhere, "security" for Iraqi army recruits and police often meant taking their weapons and training into the service of the insurgency.

Exactly at the time Petraeus was warming the President's heart with these prognostications, Iraqi was sliding rapidly towards the abyss. Soon the Iraqi army would emerge as detachments fighting on behalf of their own religious confession or ethnic composition. Civil war and appalling bloodshed were mounting fast.

Such developments escaped Gen. Petraeus' euphoric eye. "Nonetheless, there are reasons for optimism", he told the readers of the *Washington Post*. "Today approximately 164,000 Iraqi police and soldiers (of which about 100,000 are trained and equipped) and an additional 74,000 facility protection forces are performing a wide variety of security missions. Equipment is being delivered. Training is on track and increasing in capacity. Infrastructure is being repaired. Command and control structures and institutions are being reestablished. Most important, Iraqi security forces are in the fight ."

This of course was exactly the line being promoted by the top U.S. generals in Iraq, Casey and Abizaid, advancing their view that the moment was in sight when well-trained Iraqi security forces could take over, and U.S. forces commence withdrawal.

"Numbers alone cannot convey the full story", Petraeus burbled in conclusion. "Momentum has gathered in recent months. With strong Iraqi leaders out front and with continued Coalition – and now NATO – support, this trend will continue. It will not be easy, but few worthwhile things are."

History is littered with the bleached bones of optimistic military predictions, and many of these bones lie amid the sands of Iraq, Petraeus' included. It was not long before he was confiding to his journalistic outlets in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* that maybe Generals Casey and Abizaid were being unrealistic, and that he had a more prudent estimate which required a "surge".

As the reinforcements of the 101st Airborne – sent once again back to Iraq on extended tours – deploy in Baghdad, we will soon be reading fresh bulletins of "progress being made," dictated by Petraeus. Same old tunnel. More light is expected soon. CP.

(**Gardner** continued *from page 3*)

impeding eradication – the doubting, the equivocation, the incompetence, the elevation of songbirds over human life…"

In 2002, as data from the Women's Health Initiative confirmed that women taking HRT are more likely to get breast cancer, blogger Mickey Kaus quoted some of Gladwell's putdowns of Love and asked if he stood by his *New Yorker* piece. Gladwell emailed: "I was waiting for someone to write that! Okay, here's my answer: Kausfiles is quite right. I was wrong, and Susan Love ought to feel vindicated. This is the perilous – and, of course, fun – part of writing about medicine. Every now and again, scientists discover something new that turns everything we all thought we understood upside down."

This is a bizarre response – as if what was at stake were Susan Love's feelings, not the well-being of the women who started hormone replacement therapy or chose to stay on it thanks to his misleading *New Yorker* piece. Malcolm Gladwell, author of bestsellers, may know nothing about science but he knows plenty about promoting ideas and products. If he regretted having advised women to take cancer-causing drugs, he should have seen to it that a retraction was widely disseminated instead of burying a comment on kausfiles, where it didn't even warrant an item unto itself. And how about his "waiting" to be called out? Translation: "I was hoping no one would remember." CP.

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